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WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The Justice Department's Antitrust Division, citing technological advances and changes in antitrust law, tentatively approved today at the request of General Electric Co. the termination of a 1911 consent decree on the sale of incandescent light bulbs by GE and other companies. The Department reserved the right to withdraw its support up to 10 days after a public comment period.

Under the decree, GE could conduct business in incandescent lamps only under its own name and GE and other defendants were barred from fixing prices, misusing patents, entering into certain types of exclusive contracts or tying arrangements and engaging in predatory pricing.

The decree stemmed from a complaint alleging that GE tried to monopolize the incandescent lamp industry by secretly purchasing many of its competitors, fixing prices and allocating the market with the remaining competitors. The complaint also charged GE and other defendants with predatory pricing, misuse of patents and the maintenance of unlawful exclusive contracts with manufacturers of light bulb making machinery and components.

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Anne K. Bingaman, Assistant Attorney General in charge of the Antitrust Division, said the Department supported termination of the decree because it was unnecessary since many sections of the decree duplicate the effect of existing laws, while some parts bar conduct that is not considered anticompetitive today.

The Department reserved the right to withdraw its consent for at least 10 days after the close of a 60-day public comment period which the Department has requested the court to establish. Public comment on the proposed termination of the judgment is invited within that period. Interested persons may address comments to J. Robert Kramer, Chief, Litigation II Section, Antitrust Division, United States Department of Justice, 1401 H Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20530.

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